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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the degree of enthusiasm for a home visits program at an elementary school in a middle-sized California town and determined the extent to which the home visits improved students' academic and behavioral performance as a result of improving parental involvement in students' school life. Participating in the study were 200 parents, 6 students who had received home visits, 28 teachers who had conducted home visits, and administrative staff involved in the home visit program. Data were collected on pretest and posttest questionnaires measuring parents' perceptions of the school in four categories: academic, behavior, home-school communication, and miscellaneous. Pretest and posttest focus groups were held for teachers and provided qualitative anecdotal data. Teacher surveys provided posttest quantitative and qualitative data. Additional data sources were school district records on students' achievement test scores and the misconduct records for six students. Findings indicated that most teachers showed little enthusiasm for doing home visits. Those who believed in home visits as a vehicle for transformative action within the home-school relationship conducted home visits on their own initiative. Home visits were not implemented consistently, therefore a relationship between home visits and parental involvement in school and a subsequent improvement in students' grades and behavior could not be determined. Based on the findings, it was concluded that although home visits have become a popular method of dealing with increasing difficulties in students' behavior, standardized mandatory home visit programs may not be feasible. (Contains 45 references.) (Author/KB)

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The Home Visits Program

At an

Elementary School in California:

A Summative Evaluation

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Abstract

This research project is a summative evaluation of the home visits program at an elementary school in a middle-sized town of southern California that received the Nell Soto Grant in 2001. The purpose of the study was to assess the degree of enthusiasm for a home visits program at the school and to determine to what extent the home visits improve students' academic and behavioral performances as a result of improving parental participation in school life. I hoped to determine whether the home visits program has value for all stakeholders and to give the school information for decision-making regarding the maintenance of the program.

This study is purely descriptive, exploratory, and relies on one case study. Pretest and posttest questionnaires were given to parents to measure their perceptions of the school in four categories: Academic, Behavior, Home-School Communication, and Miscellaneous. Pretest and posttest focus groups were held for teachers and provided qualitative anecdotal pretest data and posttest quantitative and qualitative data from a survey. Documents from the School District provided trends regarding SAT scores. Scores and misconduct records were

provided for six individual students whose homes were visited by teachers. Additional anecdotal data were collected through formal and informal interviews with various personnel at the school.

The results were inconclusive because most teachers showed little enthusiasm for doing home visits. The few teachers who believe in home visits as a vehicle for transformative action within the home-school relationship conducted visits on their own initiative, within their individual style. Although it made no prediction about a strong causal relationship between home visits and parental involvement in the school and a subsequent improvement in students' grades and behavior, the study hoped to identify trends in those variables. Such trends could not be determined because this school did not implement home visits consistently.

The study concludes that home visits may have recently become popular as a magic solution to increasing difficulties with students' scores and behavior, but that standardized mandatory programs for home visits may be neither justified nor possible. More research is needed about the theoretical constructs that led to the believed benefits of home visits and about the dynamics of the family and school systems.

Chapter I

Proposal

Overview

Home visits by teachers at the elementary and primary levels have become the target of much publicity in California and have generated a large body of research. Considerable amounts of state funds are being released to schools in California for the specific purpose of encouraging teachers to visit their students' homes. The underlying premise of these programs is that the creation of positive relationships with parents will improve students' academic and behavioral performances. Standard 7 from Standards of Quality and Effectiveness for Pupil Personnel Services Credentials requires an "understanding of the ways in which pupil development, well-being, and learning are enhanced by family-school collaboration" (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2001). The home visits programs focus on the newly recognized importance of family-school collaboration. They use a variety of models, they rely on teachers to conduct the visits, and the participating teachers are paid with state funds.

Importance of the Study

The popularity of home visits in the media does not, in itself, substantiate their value for individual schools. In California, the Nell Soto Grant is being awarded to underachieving schools and home visits are allocated a generous portion of the grant's budget. An Elementary School, in a middle-sized town in California, is one of the schools that recently received the Nell Soto Grant for the Home Visits Program. It is important to assess whether the school finds value in home visits and whether the program offers equal value to all stakeholders including the funding source. Ultimately, this summative evaluation will become a tool for the school to decide whether school visits should become integrated in its culture, and if so, which policies should be established to guide the program's practice. A large number of questions must be addressed that deal with the process and the outcomes of home visits by teachers, but this evaluation will focus on the hypothesized increase in standardized tests scores and in positive behaviors in students whose homes have been visited by their teacher. It will also assess the staff's perception of home visits value at this elementary school.

Statement of Purpose

Considering the large financial investment in home visit programs and the expectations placed on busy teachers to participate in them, an assessment of the programs as they are uniquely implemented in various schools across the country is warranted. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the home visit program at one elementary school in California, one of the schools that received the Nell Soto Parent-Teacher Involvement Program Grant for the year 2001. The purpose of this award is to strengthen communication between schools and parents through home visits and community meetings. Although the grant implementation budget provided funds for diverse home-school activities, a large portion of the grant money is to be dedicated specifically to home visits by teachers.

Established in 1903 and located near the city's University, this is a multi-track K-5 school that operates year around. Seventy-three employees, teachers and staff, serve a student population of 770 in the year 2000-2001. The teacher to student ratio is 20:1 in kindergarten through third grade, and 35:1 in fourth and fifth grades. An approximate 63 percent of the school's student population is at or below the poverty level according to the State of California guidelines, and student mobility is

high. The largest ethnic group is Hispanic and many of these students have limited proficiency in English. Overall, the school is characterized by low socio-economic levels and low parental education levels. Of the forty credentialed teachers, thirty-four are full-time classroom teachers. Many of them already participate in after school intervention programs throughout the year.

In programs such as this one, several groups have a stake in the outcome. In home visit programs,the stakeholders include the students and their parents, the teachers, counselors, and school administrators, the funding authorities and their own stakeholders, and the general public. In many schools, devoted teachers have sometimes extended their workday by visiting some of their students in their home environment and by providing materials and encouragement to those students who needed more than the classroom time for their success. The number of students needing such additional coaching and personal attention has increased considerably over the years. As a result, most schools today provide a multitude of services to help students who struggle academically and socially. Remedial courses are offered to help students academically and counseling services have expanded significantly to address behavioral problems within the school environment.

The home visit programs offer to address similar problems by bridging the gap between the home and the school systems and doing so by reaching out to parents on their own ground. The data from this evaluation will allow Elementary School to determine the extent to which a home visit program is more or less successful as an improvement tool than other services.

Research Questions

The premise of home visit programs is that reaching out to parents on a personal level will increase parental involvement, which will in turn increase students' academic achievement and positive behavior. A large number of questions arise from this premise. First, are personal contacts from teachers a necessary and compelling cause to parental involvement in both school activities in which their children participate and in their children's homework? Such causality might be difficult to establish considering the various factors that might confound the issue. Such factors include parents' resistance to such contacts because of personal issues, embarrassment, cultural values and customs, lack of time and energy; they also include teachers' apprehension, lack of time and enthusiasm for the idea; other factors are the limited number of visits possible within one year and the negative

impact of visits that are conducted on a targeted basis, for the so-called at risk students only.

It is also important to determine whether home visits directly impact students' scores on standardized tests and other assessment of their learning. Visits can create goodwill between parents and their children's teachers and they can provide students with a renewed sense of self-worth. However, visits are rarely done more than once or twice a year for any given student. Between the visits, students might have matured sufficiently to become better students, or they may have experienced a number of positive experiences that could impact their school performance. Is it possible to say that school visits by teachers have a necessary and direct impact on students' grades? The same questions apply to any potential decrease in behavioral problems.

On the teacher's side, one wonders whether enough teachers will believe in the benefits of home visits for their students and for themselves to extend their long workday and visit families in the evening thereby adding administrative duties to those they already have. Teachers will have to carefully keep track of each visit. The home visit sponsors emphatically state that teachers must make the visits because they can directly use their new

knowledge of students in the classroom. For example, an awareness of students' daily life might prompt the teacher to be more understanding during classroom activities. On the other hand, during a home visit, teachers sometimes discover talents or interests that are not evident in the classroom. Teachers then have an opportunity to capitalize on these talents or interests and to stimulate children's academic achievement.

Another relevant question is whether teachers are the best choice among school personnel to make the visits. The literature includes studies of home visit programs in which visits are implemented by counselors or other parties neutral to the school campus. Is it possible that home visit programs might be more effective in reaching their stated goals if they are conducted by personnel already in a liaison position? Home visit programs are based on educative, community-forming, and indirect counseling tasks. Counselors, for example, already perform these tasks. However, assuming that teachers will make at least one home visit each year, will the visit promote sufficient increased self-esteem in students to also increase their grades and positive behavior? The largest research question might be: Is there a fundamental construct operating in the

nature and content of the home visit to confirm its effectiveness?

Research Design and Hypotheses

This evaluation will use a non-experimental exploratory design and will take the case study approach to one elementary school in California. No other program will be evaluated and no comparison will be made of the same program at other schools. Students' scores and misconduct incidents will be generated from the school records to measure academic performance and behavior before and after home visits. A pretest-posttest design will be used for a measure of parental attitude based on self-administered surveys that will be mailed to parents by the school staff. Focus groups will be conducted with teachers before and after they have started home visits. Quantitative and qualitative analysis of focus groups data collected through a written questionnaire will be performed for teachers' perceptions. Other non-statistical methods of data collection will be used, such as interviews and personal communications. No statistical test of hypothesis will be performed.

Methodology

A detailed description of the research process used in this summative evaluation of the home visits program at this elementary school is available in Chapter III of this report.

Assumptions

A number of facts are taken for granted at the beginning of this study. These assumptions are as follows:

- The home visit program will be initiated according to the Nel Soto Grant recommendations and stated goals
- There will be at least 50 percent of the teachers who will engage in home visits
- Each of these teachers will visit at least one student's home during the ten-month period of the study
- Teachers will have a thorough understanding of the program and will follow the guidelines provided in their training
- The data analysis methods selected will be appropriate to measure the value of the stated goals of the program

- Perception data will be relevant to establishing cause and effect relationships with behaviors and either success or failure of the program
- The data collected will provide information about the program's effectiveness at three levels: participants' awareness of its existence, distribution of valuable information and materials about and through the program, and possible changes in behavior because of the program
- No policies or ethical considerations will hamper data collection

Scope and Delimitations of the Study

Limitations. The most important limitation on this study relates to the willingness of the staff to initiate the home visits program, maintain its implementation for at least one year, and to correctly record data during implementation. This summative evaluation depends on these efforts since I will not, as researcher, perform any portion of the home visits intervention or create and administer any data collection document. I consider it a part of the evaluation to observe the degree of motivation to conduct the program that exists among teachers and other supporting staff. These limitations most likely will

decrease the validity of the results and of the conclusions drawn from them since no specific personnel with knowledge of research methodology have been appointed at the school to conduct these research activities. Another important limitation to this study lies in the existence of many lurking variables that are qualitative in nature and that will confound the data analysis.

Delimitations. Boundaries to this study exist in its various dimensions. Geographically, the study is limited to one elementary school in California. This evaluation research is further delimited in that it will not include other models in home visit programs in existence across the country. The study will include no concern about the cost effectiveness of the program since it is conducted under a grant that amply covers the expenses to the school. No budget constraints exist for this study.

Included in the scope of this research project will be the voluntary participation of all relevant staff members at the school. This summative evaluation has not been requested by the school principal or any member of the district.

Further constraints to this evaluation of the home visit program will be related to time and coordination of track schedules for data collection. Related to this

constraint will be the availability of all persons needed in the study.

This research does not intend to demonstrate causal or correlational relationships between home visits by teachers and improved scores and behaviors. It is limited to discovering possible trends in academic and behavioral performance as well as perceptions of teachers and parents regarding home-school relations.

Definitions of Terms

Few operational definitions are used in this summative evaluation. However, the term *summative evaluation* will be defined. Herman, Morris, and Fitz-Gibbon define summative evaluation by its purpose. "The goal of summative evaluation is to collect and to present information needed for summary statements and judgments about the program and its value" (1987, p. 16). By contrast, the *formative* evaluator studies every component of a program during its process. This study will, in fact, include formative evaluation aspects while focusing on drawing conclusions as to the utility of the home visit program at this elementary school.

The term *stakeholder* refers to any person or agency with an interest, monetary or otherwise, in a specific activity, process, or policies enforcement. Stakeholders,

therefore, are always affected to various extents by such activities. Stakeholders have invested something personal therefore expect a reasonable return on their investment. In the home visit program, there is a monetary investment by the State of California and the taxpayers as well as an emotional investment in creating positive relationship with the children's families. The promotion of higher academic achievement for students is a further area of investment.

Summary

Home visit programs have become the focus of efforts to improve students' academic performance and behavior by bringing together the families and the schools. Reaching out to parents is believed to necessarily create the environmental factors for positive change in these learning indicators.

This study evaluates one such program at an elementary school in California, and proposes to conclude as to its value in terms of stated goals and specific utility for the school. The summative evaluation intends to generate an educated decision by the administrators as to whether the school visit program should become an integral part of their operation.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

Introduction

For this evaluation report, specific information relevant to the home visit program at an elementary school in California, under the Nell Soto Grant of 2001, has been collected. The summative evaluation seeks to establish the program value for all stakeholders. The study took place in the context unique to this elementary school. However, the scales of value used have been taken from the abundant literature available on the declared goals of home visit programs and parental involvement in school life offered by sponsors and educational researchers. Specifically, the literature review is focused on the following research questions:

1. Are personal contacts between parents and teachers in the parents' home a necessary and compelling cause to parental involvement in school activities and in their children's academic and social life?
2. Do home visits directly impact students' scores and behavior?
3. Is there sufficient teacher buy-in to make the home visit programs effective?

4. Should personnel other than teachers also be involved in home visit programs as liaison between home and school?

The review of literature was crucial in establishing the standards to which the evidence collected at the school could be compared in order to determine value as contained in the premise that parental involvement does indeed have a direct positive impact on students' academic achievement and behavior.

The literature review will include the following three areas: (a) family systems theory, (b) operationalization of parental involvement with schools, and (c) teacher and parental resistance. Overall, the literature review will support the evaluation process towards establishing value at the levels of perceptions and behavioral changes within the school personnel and the families.

Family Systems Theory

Family systems theory is a logical place to start an investigation focused on parental involvement in schools. Family systems theory will be examined within the following topics: (a) interdependence of the school and family systems, (b) the school, the family, and the child triad, (c) collaboration and mutuality of influence, and (d) communication.

Interdependence of the school and family systems. General systems theory applied to family therapy was originally defined by Ludwig von Bertalanffy as "a complex of components in mutual interaction" (as cited in Hudson, 2000, p. 215). While it was believed in the past that the educational system and the family system were two separate entities capable of functioning outside of each other's sphere, school personnel today are daily confronting situations that do not typically belong to the academic learning experience (Caffery, Erdman, and Cook, 2000; Hickson, 1998). Discipline problems, extreme violent behavior, and academic underachievement have reached such levels that the two systems inevitably collide. It is no longer possible to expect that parents will raise their children while schools educate them. The distinction between educating and parenting is blurred, not so much because these activities have much in common, but rather because one provides the physical and psychological basis for the other to take place. In other words, the mental concentration needed in learning cannot be achieved when the child's mind is pulled towards unfulfilled biological and psychological needs. It has become more and more evident that the dualistic view of human nature cannot explain human dysfunction. Experiences at the level of the

body directly affect the mental. For example, a hungry human being cannot think. On the other hand, holistic interpretations of human functioning are supported by brain research, medical research, learning theories, and systems thinking (Herrmann, 1995; Coulter, 1994; Marzano, 1991;Senge, 1990). Parents' nurturing is a necessary fundamental basis for healthy mental and behavioral development. As a result, the educational system depends on the family system for the preconditions to learning. Each system has its role and function. When these are performed consistently and independently, harmonious interdependency can result in the absence of frustration with problems and crises, and the subsequent absence of blame from one system onto the other.

The school, the family, and the child triad. Improving students' behavior and their academic performance is believed to revolve around such school and family partnerships (Acosta, Keith, and Patin, 1997; Christenson, 1997; Lockwood, 1988; Marcon, 1999; Nistler and Maiers, 1999; Peña, 2000). This is evident in a report of an interview with Joyce L. Epstein. "Key to Epstein's philosophy is her belief in an integrated, community-wide approach to learning and teaching that focuses on in-depth knowledge of students and families, on their strengths, and

on their needs" (Lockwood, 1988). Becvar and Becvar explain, "Systems theory directs our attention away from the individual and individual problems viewed in isolation and towards relationships and relationship issues between individuals" (2000, p.8). Families and schools, as specific environments, have their own code and expectations. School-age children move in and out of these two systems everyday. Before they go to school, children and their parents form a dyadic system. As soon as children go to school, a triangle is formed in which children are caught between the family and the school systems. This is not unlike the world of adults who find it difficult to balance home life and work demands. Some family therapy models focus on treating families within their own system, hoping that improvement in the family interactions will transfer over to the school environment where children will show academic and behavioral improvement (Nicoll, 1992). On the other hand, more family therapists believe that the relationship between the school and the family must also be the target of interventions in order to adequately service the triad (Caffery, Erdman, and Cook, 2000). The school children's situation is interpreted as triangulation between the two systems (O'Callaghan, 1993).

Triangulation is an important concept in Murray Bowen's theory. "When situations of chronic anxiety is increased beyond the level of tolerance of the dyad, a vulnerable other person may become triangulated" (Becvar and Becvar, 2000, p. 159). The family-school dyad places children in that vulnerable third position because each system has different expectations of them and demands their allegiance. Children cope with this situation in two major ways. They either try to keep the systems separate, or they form a coalition with one system against the other (Caffery et al., 2000). School-family collaboration is targeted today by educational personnel in order to prevent such coping mechanisms from operating since they do not appear to be beneficial to either member of the triad.

Collaboration and mutuality of influence. Seeking families' involvement in the school life of their children while also promoting in teachers the desire to build relationships with their students' families supports an important systems thinking tenet. "From the systems thinking perspective, the human actor is part of the feedback process, not standing apart from it. . . . The feedback perspective suggests that everyone shares responsibility for problems generated by a system" (Senge, 1990, p. 78). In seeking to create partnerships with

parents, schools assert their awareness of the complexity of children's lives in their developing years. They also acknowledge, ever so tacitly, the interconnectedness of the two systems, school and family. Additionally, they place themselves within the larger social context, which they must understand in order for the partnership to be successful, not only to improve students' behavior and academic achievement, but also to produce significant, long-term benefits for society in general through the systems principle of leverage. Leverage means "small, well-focused actions can sometimes produce significant, enduring improvements, if they are in the right place" (Senge, p. 64). In a study of inner-city preschoolers, Marcon (1999) found that a single involvement event generated a positive outcome. So far, the school and family systems have operated as closed systems because each permitted limited input from the other. When input exists, it often threatens the identity of the system therefore it disrupts it (Becvar and Becvar, 2000). For example, when parents call the school administrator to blame a teacher for their child's failure or discipline problems, as if in coalition with the child, the school will close itself to the interference in order to protect its identity manifested in its teachers. Similarly, when schools invite parents to school

activities, yet do not make them feel welcome, the parents close themselves to the school system, thinking that they are being patronized by it. Home visits by teachers may be a tool to establish openness between the two systems thereby allowing reciprocal causality to occur. Parents' involvement in school activities and home visits by teachers represent reciprocal causality, which leads to mutuality of influence (Becvar and Becvar). Many variables are to be factored into such mutuality. In order to evaluate whether both systems allow their spheres of influence to overlap for the benefit of all stakeholders, one must explore the systems methodology adopted by the schools with regards to these variables and how they affect the effectiveness of their communication styles.

Communication. Systems methodologies exist on a continuum from hard to soft (Robards and Gillepsie, 2000). In hard methodologies, the problem is clearly defined and can be subjected to quantification. In soft methodologies, on the other hand, the situation in not clearly delineated, and people skills that rely primarily on observation, listening, and communication, are useful. The problem of students' behavior and academic achievement belongs to both hard and soft methodologies. The problem is agreed upon and can be subjected to quantification with state tests scores.

On the other hand, many human factors exist within the problem's definition, and the solutions are dependent on these subjective human factors. Health problems alone can seriously interfere with achievement; poverty or abuse will definitely place a tremendous barrier to learning in a child's life. Unless teachers and administrators are sincere in their desire for a partnership with parents, tests scores statistics will be useless as tools to assess improvement. A new understanding of family and school systems dynamics is also necessary. When the two systems are perceived as mutually beneficial, communication between their members will take on a more open, trusting style, and mutually beneficial behaviors will take place. Educational professionals often make judgments about parents based on isolated events, and they communicate these judgments to the parents even when they outwardly solicit their involvement (Grossman, 1999; Lambie, 2000; McCarthey, 1999). Although communication between school and home has been identified as a first step towards increased parental involvement (Marcon, 1999), the nature of the communication style is vitally important. The personal touch is the most welcome communication approach, from a parent's perspective (Lindle, 1989). From a systemic perspective, communication between systems and the individuals within them will simply

translate effectively their systemic worldview. Mutual influence, shared responsibility, and no blame are fundamental to this worldview. In family therapy, Virginia Satir is recognized as having developed a successful communication style. "Through her process model, Satir created a trusting and nurturing context in which family members could let down their defenses, risk sharing their feelings, and learn new behaviors" (Becvar and Becvar, 2000, p. 228). In school to parent communication, the goal is also to generate trust within genuine interest and congruent communication. Lambie (2000) points out that communication skills vary greatly, particularly among parents. Educators may or may not have honed their own. More important than skills, however, are the attitudes and behaviors that reflect a genuine awareness of the reciprocity of systems. Knowledge of students' personalities, backgrounds, and cultural contexts as well as respect for persons will facilitate a communication style that generates a sense of belonging in children (Bell, 1966; McCarthey, 1999; Nistler, 1999). Communicating how we interpret the other person's stance towards us and learning to speak the other person's language are the most productive tools for eliminating relational problems (Becvar and Becvar, 2000). In bringing families and schools

together, communicative tools must help to respect, understand, and reflect the conceptual structure of each system.

Operationalization of Parental Involvement with Schools

Parental involvement with schools will be explored in the assumptions that underlie most programs designed to generate such involvement and in the models used by different schools and teachers to achieve this goal.

Assumptions. Home visits by teachers, as one means to obtain parental involvement in the school life of their children, have generated much attention in the media and educational publications (Green, 2000; Sandham, 1999; Acosta et al., 1997; Swick, 1997; "American Teacher", 2000). Although chosen to attract the readers' attention, titles of these articles reveal certain assumptions about the reasons for these programs' implementation. "Getting help from home," "Educators hit street to welcome parents," for example, focus on the areas of education that are lacking.

The first assumption that has given rise to home visit programs is that schools can no longer do their job alone (Green, 2000; Christenson, 1992; Peña, 2000; Swick, 1997; Nistler and Maiers, 1999; Nistler and Maiers, 2000; *Strong*

Families, Strong Schools). Help from home consists of much more than involvement in the school social agenda. Parents are now recruited to participate as coaches in academic activities such as reading, literacy programs, and math curricula. Teachers often feel that their efforts in the classroom are undermined by the apparent absence of care and support on the parents' part. Teachers' complaints indicate that they expect parents to give them support by supervising or helping with homework, providing additional tutoring when necessary, and by siding with teachers and school administrators regarding the various policies that are a part of any classroom. The implicit expectations of parents are often based on unrealistic stereotypes such as the assumption that all parents belong to the middle class where there is sufficient time and money for parents to support their children in their school tasks. However, personal experiences, social and economic status are a few factors that influence parents in how much or how little they do get involved in their children's schooling (Grossman, 1999). Some studies, on the other hand, reveal that social factors are less important than the presence of family activities that support educational goals (*Strong Families, Strong Schools; School Family Partnerships*). On that basis, many educators try to obtain parental support

of their children's educational progress by bringing them into various literacy programs, thereby accomplishing two goals: developing social relationships with parents and teaching them the value of literacy (Nistler and Maiers, 1999; Nistler and Maiers, 2000). Complaints about parents go further than targeting the lack of support in academic activities. Many children today come to school hungry or suffering from intense stress, anxiety, and anger. It appears evident that some parents are not, for many reasons, fulfilling their basic nurturing responsibilities towards their children. Under those conditions, the children's basic needs for physical and psychological health are not met and learning cannot take place. This situation has given rise to a multitude of social services that used to be separate from the schools, but are now offered within the schools' organization.

The second assumption underlying home visits and other programs to obtain parental involvement in schools is that it is no longer politically correct to exclude parents from the school system with practices that discourage most parents from getting involved. It is undeniable that biases rooted in misconceptions, within the areas of race, socioeconomic status, and religion, have infiltrated the

world of educators over time. In today's multicultural society, such biases are unacceptable. Poverty status is particularly targeted as the object of prejudicial misconceptions, possibly because the educational system's infrastructure is primarily middle class. Faulty mental images about parents generate negative parental reactions, which perpetuate a cycle of ignorance and ill feelings. Within this type of atmosphere, children indeed suffer (Grossman, 1999). Cultural proficiency is mandated today in the schools as it is in business and industry. In a *Manual for School Leaders*, the attributes of the educational leaders who are aware and accepting of cultural differences are summarized. "Culturally proficient leaders see their schools as learning organizations devoted to self-study, as well as to learning about the community and its children (Lindsey, Robins and Terrell, 1999, p. 60). The authors further elaborate on the notion of cultural proficiency in the schools by saying: "As educators, we play a key role in enhancing the relationship between the school and the community, both as individuals as participants in schoolwide and districtwide decisions" (Lindsey et al., p. 24). It appears that many of the programs that are already in place to generate parental involvement have a primary stated goal to reach out to all parents and develop a

personal relationship with them, on their own ground. The home visits programs, more specifically, achieve that goal since they bring teachers in the children's home instead of waiting for the parents to feel sufficiently comfortable to get involved on the school ground.

The third assumption underlying these programs is that parents have much to contribute in building up their children's self-esteem, sense of safety and of belonging. The parental role is typically seen as a teaching role from the early years. Preschoolers learn, with or without teachers. However, guidance, positive reinforcement, and exposure to materials and experiences within the home are known factors that increase the speed and amount of learning. Science today declares that babies learn in the womb. Overall, genuine attention from parents motivates children to learn and builds their self-esteem (Bell, 1966). Generally, studies indicate that very young children's sense of self-worth and efficacy is created by tough love type parenting practices, but is increased considerably when children witness the bond and partnership alliance between their parents and their teachers (*School-Family Partnerships*; Christenson, 1992; Green, 2000).

Models. While there is considerable agreement on the benefits of bridging home and schools, the methods used to reach that goal vary greatly. Within the home visit programs alone, many models are used. Generally, the programs are personalized by the teachers involved, according to the specific needs of the schools implementing them. The characteristics of these programs can be divided in categories based on the following criteria: (a) targeted or universal population, (b) simple social agenda, (c) choice of persons who conduct the visits, (d) use of visits to provide social services and educational training to parents, and (e) frequency of visits, with or without follow-ups. These categories are not exhaustive, but represent the criteria that define most models. The literature reveals that the number of programs in existence in the United States is large. A few have been selected for this review.

1. The Socorro Middle School, El Paso, Texas. In this program, the families have been chosen at random, and the teachers are conducting the visits. One teacher is in charge of organizing and managing the program. A training handbook for teachers has been prepared in which the goal is outlined; it is

restricted to getting to know the parents. Visits, however, lead to the delivery of social and educational services. Visit follow-ups in the form of thank-you notes are included (Acosta, 1997).

2. Developmental Kindergarten. This unidentified school has 400 students, and each student is visited by the same teacher twice a year. Each visit lasts approximately thirty minutes and consists of social time. The teacher, however, found herself distributing educational material to parents. She also felt that, over time, she became a mentor for the parents (Bell, 1966).

3. Edison High, Minneapolis. The largest group in this school consists of African-American families therefore it was targeted for the first round of visits. The visits are done in teams that include the school's principal, teachers, counselors, psychologists, and police liaison officers. Follow-up phone calls are made. The visit is purely a social contact (*American Teacher*, 2000).

4. Chicago Board of Education, Chicago, IL. Here a school-community representative (SCR) for elementary schools visits the students' homes every two months.

Educational guidance is given to parents as well as referrals to social agencies when necessary (Christenson, 1992).

5. Home-School-community Agents Project: Columbus, OH. Twenty-six agents have a caseload of sixty students each. They conduct frequent home visits and make social agencies referrals (Christenson, 1992).

This sample of home visits programs is minimal, but an exhaustive review is beyond the scope of this study. The educational personnel generally feel satisfied that home visits are beneficial to all parties involved in terms of improved communication and support. Regardless of the model used, home visits appear to generate an increase in parental involvement in school activities and curricula.

Teacher and parental resistance

The claimed success of home visits and other programs for parental involvement in schools does not preclude the existence of difficulties on both sides. In many schools, teachers' instinctive reaction is to say: "Just one more thing to do" (Principal, personal communication, January 17, 2001). Systematic teacher training on family involvement is necessary but sporadic (Epstein, 1992).

Until fairly recently, teachers have, in fact, been trained to keep parents out of the learning process. Many teachers feel that parents hamper their efforts at covering the curriculum while maintaining discipline in their classrooms. Some districts have parent liaison or home-school coordinators to avoid adding to the load of teachers. They visit homes regularly and provide educational workshops for parents (Lueder, 1989). Another concern of teachers and administrators is that welcoming parents within the school system will lead to interference with their job and to threats to their status as educators. Decision-making roles given to parents is tension producing (Hiatt, 1994). Apart from the teachers who welcome parents, many still feel that parents have little, if anything, to offer the school organization (Epstein, 1992).

On the parents' side, the resistance factors are at least as numerous as on the teachers' side. The president of the National Education Association, Keith Geiger, has acknowledged: "The sad fact is that in many instances parents don't feel as if we welcome them in school" ("Education Daily", 1994). Complicated procedures, lack of time on the part of teachers and staff, and unwelcoming signs on campus all contribute to that feeling. In

addition, parents often feel that their interests are not taken into account because school personnel are not aware of the families' history and needs. Language and cultural barriers increase that feeling by reducing effective communication and increasing misinterpretation of behaviors (Aronson, 1996). Poor families and middle-class staff are distrustful of each other (Comer, 1988) and educational jargon is intimidating (Moles, 1993). Logistics complications compound the problem for many parents. Transportation, childcare needs, and work schedules prevent many parents from getting as involved as they would like (Moles). Finally, there are parents who believe that the schools should do their job without them. In the end, the most difficult barrier to overcome may be that parents blame the school, and the school blames parents for the children's problems (Rotheram, 1989).

It is important to remember that schools and parents try to reach out to each other mainly because many students in schools today have serious behavioral and academic difficulties. Partnerships with parents may represent a team effort in which community building is the only hope for a sustainable learning environment.

Summary

The literature reviewed in this study indicates that visits by teachers to their students have value by creating goodwill. Within a family system approach, it is evident that the interdependence of home and school is inevitable therefore students will benefit from mutually beneficial exchanges between the two systems. Parenting and educating are not separate and mutually exclusive functions, so teachers and parents who work together benefit the children. Since children belong to both systems simultaneously, it seems evident that family and school collaboration with shared responsibilities will benefit students. According to systems thinking, a very small action like a short home visit can have enormous long term impact in initiating reciprocity and trust in exchanges between teacher and parent.

Many models for home visits have recorded improvements in students' scores and behavior. It appears, however, that much variance exists between these programs with regards to several variables: (1) who makes the visit, (2) how frequently visits are made, (3) whether families are visited on a targeted basis or not, and (4) the nature of the visit, from purely social and friendly to

educational. Without a large sample of data from schools that make visits in the same way, it is not possible to determine the long-term, necessary, and compelling nature of the home visits programs as predictors of students' improved academic and behavioral achievement.

Neither is the interdependence of the school and family systems necessarily a compelling factor in students' improvement in grades and behavior since factors such as parental resistance and teachers' lack of interest diminish the potential of the home visit programs. The literature provides numerous barriers to parental engagement. Lack of time, cultural differences, and low educational and economic levels are some of them. Teachers also have reservations as to time and the parents' ability to contribute without interfering in their educational goals and responsibilities.

Overall, home visits programs are valuable to the schools where teachers and administrative personnel endorse the concept and support the programs' implementation.

Chapter III

Methodology

Introduction

This summative evaluation of the Home Visits Program at an elementary school in California emphasizes attainment of program goals, objectives, and other outcomes. Its purpose is to help the program's sponsors and the program's participants decide its degree of success and its future. An important component of such assessment lies in establishing the degree of motivation and enthusiasm demonstrated by the participants in the program. The methodology used in this evaluation reflects the need to leave the program's initiation, implementation, and maintenance completely in the hands of the school's staff. This methodology section simply reports on the program's outcomes as they were provided by the participants.

Populations and Samples

Populations. Four types of populations are involved in this evaluation: the students, their parents, their teachers, and the administrative staff. Authorization to study these populations was given through two documents. The school Administrator asked me to sign a document released by the District named "Research Proposal

Certification and District Protection Statement." I signed this form on June 7, 2001.

Samples. From each population, convenience sampling was conducted. Several non-equivalent samples were extracted to collect primary data. From the parent population, 200 families were chosen to respond to pretest and posttest questionnaires. A different number of these families returned the questionnaire and no effort was made to identify whether the same families responded to both questionnaires. The entire student population was used to examine the SAT9 scores over the last four years without any relationship to home visits. A purposive sample of six from the student population was taken representing students who had received home visits. The sample was examined for scores and misconduct incidents. Among the teacher population, the sample of 28 was again purposive since not all teachers conducted home visits. Those who did were asked to identify themselves and report on their experience on the questionnaire provided in the focus group. However, 28 teachers were given the questionnaire and they were to respond on a voluntary basis, whether they had conducted home visits or not. From the staff, only the individuals directly involved in the home visit program were used as

sample I this evaluation. They include the Principal, Assistant Principal, the School Counselor, the Parent Liaison Kindergarten Teacher, and one member of the office staff. Neither of the samples described can be considered representative of the entire school and parent population because initial bias existed in the voluntary basis for home visits. Teachers were free to select homes where no previous hostility towards the school was expressed. They also selected homes because of known problems such as late homework, children not being picked up by parents, or no permission slips from home. These visits were therefore done on a targeted basis, which is a form of bias in data collection. Similarly, the teachers were free to attend or not attend the focus groups where they perceptions regarding home visits were solicited. Although randomization of the samples for better representation of the population was hoped for, it was not expected from the participants in the program. In addition, since this study is a summative evaluation at this one school specifically, generalization of the results to other populations for establishing replication and reliability does not apply. Finally, the sample size for the homes visited by teachers was unfortunately quite small. The small sample cannot be considered representative of the school population.

Variables and Measures

Variables. The independent variable in this study is the home visit program. A large number of independent variables exists. They include academic scores on standardized tests and general academic performance, referrals for misconduct and behavioral interventions, teachers' perceptions of the program and its impact on their lives as teachers, the parents' perceptions of a home-school relationship, the administrator's motivational techniques towards the teachers who are encouraged to conduct home visits, and the variance between grades, from K to 5, that is built into children's developmental stages and is reflected in their reaction to the visits.

Measures. The measures used in the parent survey are a 4-point Likert scale generating ordinal data. The survey distributed to teachers generated nominal data from dichotomous questions, multiple choice questions, and open-ended transformative type interview questions. Interval data were compiled from the students SAT9 scores. Nominal data were obtained from the entries in the discipline category of the school software record keeping. Anecdotal nominal data were also obtained from informal conversations and formal interviews with several staff members.

Validity and Reliability

Validity. Face validity and content validity exist in the instruments and the measures within these instruments because specific characteristics of the home visit program are measured and the questions cover the area under study. On the other hand, the study does not provide for criterion validity because no correlation relationships with other instruments are included in the study. Construct validity is good and it is built into the measurements of school-home communications as well as in possible improvements in scores and reduction in the number of discipline referrals. The internal validity of this evaluation is low because the study simply looks at a program and its outcome without interventions that would justify causal or correlational hypotheses. Throughout the data collection and measurement of the variables under study, the internal validity of this research might also have been compromised by the Hawthorne effect in which the participants are aware of the study and its purpose, and adjust their responses and behaviors accordingly. This threat to validity will be taken into account in the conclusions to the study. External validity is reasonably good because similar programs exist and they could be evaluated in the same manner.

Reliability. I view my own reliability in recording data from teachers and the Principal during the pretest meeting as suspect because I might have unconsciously interpreted comments by the teachers in light of negative comments made to me by the Principal before the meeting. The reliability of parents and teachers' answers to the questionnaires is consistent with perceptions type surveys in which subjective answers are expected.

Data Collection

The pretest parent survey was mailed by the school staff in March 2001. The survey was meant to collect opinions, beliefs, attitudes, reactions, behaviors, and attributes from parents regarding the following categories: academic, behavioral, school-home communication, miscellaneous subjective general perceptions. This last category included questions about school cleanliness, safety, and the children's happiness at school. The survey was anonymous, and it collected primary type data. It included twenty statements. The same survey was sent to parents in March 2002 as a posttest at the end of the year when home visits were to have taken place. The families who had received home visits were not identified (See copy of the questionnaire in Appendix C).

A pretest focus group with teachers was facilitated by the school Principal during one of the regular staff meetings, in April 2001. I was invited as an observer at the meeting, and I collected nominal primary data as I recorded the teachers' comments during the discussion. In March 2002, surveys were distributed to teachers during another focus group as a posttest. The surveys were to be filled anonymously and returned to the Principal later. In this survey, the first question was a screening question asking whether home visits had been conducted by the teacher during the year. The question was forked, leading to additional specific separate questions for either a 'yes' or a 'no' response. The rest of the questionnaire elicited opinions and perceptions about the transformative value of home visits by teachers whether they had conducted visits or not. This survey consisted of a total of seven questions (See a copy of the survey in Appendix D).

A printout of the students' Preliminary SAT9 Results for 2000-2001 at this school was procured from the School District as secondary data. The scores cover Mathematics and Language Arts. Other secondary data were obtained from the school software that records students scores and discipline memos. The student's test scores data covered

the student's current as well as previous grade at the school, when applicable. The discipline memos provided secondary nominal data that had been entered by the teacher or counselor who had an interview with the students in question regarding misconduct incidents.

All other nominal primary data were collected throughout the year when I formally and informally interviewed several members of the staff. These data include personal communications and anecdotal information that I noted for further reference.

Data Analysis Procedures

With the parent questionnaire, the response rate was calculated with a simple percentage. The questions were coded within the categories listed above because the categories were not explicitly named in the questionnaire and the questions were not grouped within these categories. I created the categories as I studied the questions. I determined to use the responses in both the fourth point and the third point of the Likert scale, *strongly agree and agree*, to establish percentages of agreement. They will be listed separately and also combined in Chapter IV, The Results.

A response rate was also established for the teachers' survey and the number of teachers who conducted visits was counted and translated into a percentage of the returned surveys. The other questions were analyzed using qualitative methods. Nominal items in each question were considered as units of analysis. Data were sifted through repeated readings to discover patterns and categories. The frequency of responses to specific questions was noted. Omission of answers was also noted. Stable sets of items were then created within a classification scheme. From these analyses, trends were extracted and formulated into tentative conclusions and recommendations for further research. These are narrated in Chapter V of this study. Similar qualitative analysis was performed on anecdotal and interview data.

An examination of the SAT9 Scores for 2000-2001 led to extracting trends in improvement since the record covers a four-year span, from 1998 to 2001 inclusive, in spite of the labeling 2000-2001.

The SAT-9T scores from students who were visited by their teachers were examined in the raw score column and compared with the scores obtained before the visit(s). A percentage of the variance, if any, was calculated.

The memos regarding misconduct incidents for the same students were analyzed for frequency, intensity, and duration before and after the home visits.

Summary

The methodology used in this summative evaluation of the home visits program at this elementary school is congruent with the objective of assessing not only the possible improvements in students' scores and behavior after home visits but also the general attitude of parents towards the school and its communication patterns with them and the motivation exhibited by teachers towards the program itself.

Chapter IV

Results

Unanticipated Occurrences

During the year covered by the Nell Soto Grant for home visits and related activities at the school, the teachers consistently demonstrated lukewarm interest for the program. This surprised me and caused me to receive fewer data sets than I had anticipated. I made regular visits to the Principal to recharge her interest. Finally, I received some data from the Assistant Principal on March 22, 2002 when the Principal had left on vacation.

Parent questionnaire, Pretest and Posttest

The survey form used was identical for the pretest and the posttest surveys collected in March 2001 and March 2002. The 20 statements were ranking items on a scale from 1 to 4 with 1 being *Strongly Agree*. A copy of the questionnaire is included in Appendix C. I divided the statements into four categories as follows:

1. Academic: Statements # 4, 5, 9, 16, 18, 19
2. Behavioral: Statements # 6, 10, 13, 15
3. School-Home Communication: Statements # 1, 2, 14, 17, 20

4. Miscellaneous Subjective Perceptions: Statement # 3 (school cleanliness), 8 (child's happiness at school, 12 (safety at school)

For the pretest, questionnaires were sent to 200 families and 130 returned it. This represents a response rate of 65%. For the posttest, out of 200 families, 59 returned the questionnaire, which is a response rate of 30%. I received no information that would allow me to speculate about this discrepancy.

The frequency tables generated by the staff show that parents' responses are generously distributed between the *Strongly Agree* and the *Agree* positions for all 20 questions, both in the pretest and the posttest. These responses show a positive overall parental perception about the school in all categories. A comparison between the posttest and pretest responses will show whether any increase occurs in the posttest in percentages within the four categories: Academic, Behavior, School-Home Communication, and Miscellaneous.

Pretest and posttest percentages as well as the differences between the two are displayed in Table 1 for the Academic Category. The most dramatic increases are reflected in the posttest strongly agree, especially for

Questions #5 and #18 that deal with parents being informed about their children's academic progress. In the *Agree* position, there is a decrease in posttest percentages for the same questions. It is evident that, during the past year, some parents were not as well informed about their children's grades and general academic progress as others. One can only speculate about the reasons, but this indicates at least that a school-wide policy about information to parents is not in place.

Table 1

Parent Survey Pretest & Posttest in the Academic Category

ACADEMIC	**PRETEST**		**POSTTEST**		**DIFFERENCE**	
	STRONGLY AGREE	**AGREE**	**STRONGLY AGREE**	**AGREE**	**STRONGLY AGREE**	**AGREE**
Question #4	48	42	51	41	**3**	**-1**
Question #5	58	33	68	30	**10**	**-3**
Question #9	53	35	59	36	**6**	**1**
Question #16	55	35	56	34	**1**	**-1**
Question #18	57	32	73	24	**16**	**-8**
Question #19	70	23	73	27	**3**	**4**

The Behavior Category includes four questions and the results are displayed in Table 2. The posttest shows an increase in both *Strongly Agree* and *Agree* for all questions. Question#6, "*The school sets high expectations for student behavior*" shows the highest increase (8%) in the *Agree* position, but no increase or decrease in the *Strongly Agree* position.

Table 2

Parent Survey Pretest & Posttest in the Behavior Category

BEHAVIOR	PRETEST		POSTTEST		DIFFERENCE	
	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE
Question #6	49	40	49	48	0	8
Question #10	70	23	73	25	3	2
Question #13	56	32	59	37	3	5
Question #15	48	37	52	42	4	5

The School-home Communication Category includes seven questions. Question #7 shows a dramatic decrease of 14% in the *Agree* position but it also shows an 18% increase in the *Strongly Agree* position. The question states: "*The teachers*

are dedicated to helping all students." This result indicates that dedication to the students varies greatly from teacher to teacher, at least in the parents' perception. The response might also mean that some parents feel their children receive less attention than others by the same teacher. In Question #1: "*I feel welcome at my Elementary School,*" a negative difference in the *Agree* position indicates that some parents do not feel as welcome as they did a year ago. All other questions show positive differences between pretest and posttest. The most dramatic increase is in the *Strongly Agree* position in Question #17: "*My School provides learning opportunities for parents.*" This shows a significant improvement in the extension of the learning environment into the family. Question #14 also shows a positive increase between pretest and posttest in the opportunities given to parents to volunteer at the school. Most questions in this category deal with communication with parents on the campus site. Question #20 does not specify whether discussions about concerns take place at school or at home, which is consistent with the overall tone of the survey. All questions are school-focused. No question mentions visits to the parents' home.

Table 3

Parent Survey Pretest & Posttest in the Home-School Communication Category

HOME-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION	PRETEST		POSTTEST		DIFFERENCE	
	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE
Question #1	56	37	64	32	**8**	**-5**
Question #2	39	48	44	51	**5**	**3**
Question #7	50	39	68	25	**18**	**-14**
Question #11	65	26	70	25	**5**	**-1**
Question #14	51	35	58	39	**7**	**4**
Question #17	38	46	52	46	**14**	**0**
Question #20	65	23	71	27	**6**	**4**

The Miscellaneous Category includes three questions. One refers to cleanliness on campus, one to the students' happiness at school, and one to their sense of safety. Question #8 about students' happiness at the school shows a significant decrease in the *Agree* position yet a significant increase in the *Strongly Agree* position. Evidently a wide spread exists in these responses, which

reflects large discrepancies in individual students' perceptions or that of their parents. These perceptions can be tied to a large number of variables. The question about safety shows a small decrease in the *Agree* position but a 10% increase in the *Strongly Agree* position. In general, most parents find the campus cleaner in the posttest.

Table 4

Parent Survey Pretest & Posttest in the Miscellaneous Category

MISCELLANEOUS	PRETEST		POSTTEST		DIFFERENCE	
	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE
Question #3/clean	59	30	54	44	**-5**	**14**
Question #8/happy	50	39	75	20	**25**	**-19**
Question #12/safe	56	35	66	31	**10**	**-4**

Teacher Survey, Pretest and Posttest

Pretest. The first focus group meeting where I was present took place in April 2001. The Principal facilitated the group and presented the home visits program in a very positive light, attempting to generate enthusiasm for it.

When asked for their perceptions and concerns, teachers brought up more concerns than positive comments. The major concern was lack of time and some resentment at having to take on one more task. Another concern was safety and probable lack of a good reception by parents. One teacher thought that parents might view the visits as a way for the school to check on how they lived. Two teachers wondered what they would do if they witnessed a reportable behavior or situation while in the home. They did not want to be in that position since it would break the trust they were trying to build. The general impression from the meeting was that at leas two-thirds of the teachers wished the topic of home visits had not been brought up. The pattern in this pretest focus group was a negative perception of home visits by the majority of teachers.

In addition to this pretest focus group with teachers during a staff meeting, I obtained pretest data in a formal interview with the Kindergarten Teacher who acts as liaison with parents of pre-kindergarten children. This teacher attended a seminar on home visits programs in Ontario, CA, before the Nell Soto Grant was awarded to the school. She stated that she enjoyed the seminar because she believes in the value of home visits and has already done many of them.

She believes that visits bring home and school closer together, a relationship that definitely enhances, in her opinion, the children's performance at school. This teacher has organized her own home visits program within the school for her own classroom. She has created many materials, well organized in boxes, and she takes these boxes to homes where she loans them to the parents for a period of one week at a time. The parent must be present and participate in the visit with the child. During the visit, the teacher trains the parent to use the materials. This teacher focuses her readiness-training program on pre-K children to prepare them for Kindergarten. Another informal conversation took place with the School Counselor, and she provided a positive assessment of the readiness-training program. She said that some parents have been so impressed by the school-home relationship that they have come to campus to offer their volunteer services in whatever capacity that the school could use. Some of them have taken the initiative of cleaning and maintaining the flowerbeds on campus.

This pretest for teachers' perceptions on the home visits program reveals that home visits remain an individual

choice by an occasional teacher who understands the concept, its goal, and its benefits.

Posttest. A survey was distributed to 28 teachers and 16 returned them. This represents a response rate of 57%. Out of this percentage of response, 38% visited students' homes, or 6 out of 16. Of these six teachers, one Kindergarten teacher did eight visits, another Kindergarten teacher did one visit, one 3rd-grade teacher did one visit, one 5th-grade teacher did four visits, another 5th-grade teacher did one visit, and another 5th-grade teacher did four visits. This makes a total of 19 visits. Fifty percent of the teachers did one visit. There is no record of whether multiple visits were made to the same family. Since the student population is 770, these 19 visits represent a percentage of 0.02 per student or 1% of 200 families. Such a low percentage warrants speculation about the teachers and administrators' lack of enthusiasm for home visits even though they were generously funded by a grant. Kindergarten and 5th-grade students received 47% of the visits, respectively. This indicates that the teachers who believe in conducting home visits are in K and 5th-grade. One can reasonably say that these teachers consider the grade level they teach important milestones in children's development

and, perhaps for that reason, see the benefits of connecting with the family system to meet the students' needs. For those who did home visits, Question #1 asked a) *their most pleasant experience*, and b) *their most difficult experience*. Five out of six teachers (83%) indicated that the most satisfying part of the home visit experience was the positive socialization with the parent and the student. One of these five teachers (17%) found that time was a constraint. Another of these five teachers (17%) found it difficult to initiate the visit. Of the six teachers who did visits, one (17%) found nothing enjoyable in the visit. This teacher used the visit to discuss problems and get signatures. This teacher also found it unpleasant because the parents were inhospitable and the yard was junky. The teachers who did not do home visits were not asked to answer a) and b) from Question #1, and they did not.

Posttest results for questions #2 through #7 for teachers who did visits. Question #2 asked: "*What value do you think home visits have?*" and offered the following choices:

1. Make children feel proud
2. Help parents feel welcome
3. Help teacher understand child's behavior

4. Help teacher discover child's interests and abilities
5. Intrusion in parent's life
6. Waste of time
7. Very little value
8. No value at all
9. Other

Out of the six teachers who did home visits, five (83%) checked choice #1, five (83%) checked choice #2, five (83%) checked choice #3, two (33%) checked choice #4, one (17%) checked choice #5, and none checked the choices #6 through #9. These results indicate that teachers who did home visits agree that the student-parent-teacher triad greatly benefits from the visits. None of the teachers said that the visits have no value. This result may indicate the teachers' desire to be politically correct since the visits are endorsed by the Principal. A small percentage of teachers who did visits felt a definite sense of intrusion in the home life. This may be a projection of their personal feelings.

Question #3 asked: *"What is the biggest barrier in conducting home visits?"* Out of the six teachers who did visits, three (50%) named lack of time, one (17%) named lack of safety, and one (17%) said not liking to invite

oneself. When compared with the pretest data, these results reflect an identical pattern.

Question #4 asked: *"What types of support would help teachers conduct home visits?"* Two teachers (33%) said a partner to go on the visit would help; another (17%) said a letter sent home to announce the visit would ease the discomfort. The other respondents (50%) did not ask for support. These results seem to indicate that the teachers who do home visits are intrinsically motivated because they attribute value to the visits therefore they do not seek help from the school.

Question #5 asked: *"How do home visits change the relationship between teacher and student?"* Three teachers (50%) said that it improves students' behavior through a sense of accountability; one teacher (17%) said that the visits had a huge effect on the students' self-esteem. The other teachers (33%) did not know. It might have been difficult for teachers to have opportunities to observe change in this area if they conducted only one visit. Fifty percent of teachers conducted only one visit. Those who conducted multiple visits may have done only one visit per family.

Question #6 asked: *"How do home visits improve students' grades and scores on standardized tests?"* Although this question was not applicable to Kindergartner's teachers, one K teacher (17%) said that the visits improve the children's work in school. The other teachers (83%) did not respond. This is consistent with the interview I had with the parent liaison K Teacher who trains parents and pre-K children. I would have expected the teachers to be interested in monitoring their students' grades after their visits since all teachers have a personal stake in seeing their students achieve.

Question #7 asked: *"How do home visits improve students' behavior?"* All six teachers (100%) said that the visits improved students' behaviors mostly because they become aware that the teacher cares about them or is watching them closely. It is uncertain whether this response is based on actual behavior changes or whether it reflects expectations.

Summary of results from teachers who did home visits. Children's pride, feeling of welcome by parents, and better understanding of children by teachers were each checked by 83% of teachers. Lack of time to do visits was mentioned by 50% of the teachers. Visiting in pairs rather than alone

was mentioned as a preference by 33% of teachers. The other teachers were comfortable without other support. It is agreed by 66% of the teachers that students' behavior and self-esteem will increase after home visits. Only 17% of the teachers said that scores improved after visits. Although question #7 was meant to be different from question #5, most teachers treated them as similar and responded that behavior would improve. Therefore, the percentage of teachers who predict better behavior after visits goes to 100%. These results are generally positive as far as outcomes for all members of the triad: parent, student, and teacher. The results indicate concerns regarding the time involved in conducting worthwhile visits.

Posttest results for questions #2 through #7 for teachers who did not do visits. The teachers who did not do home visits were also asked to answer questions #2 through #7 in order to compare their perceptions with those provided by the visiting teachers. For question #2, out of ten teachers who did not do home visits, ten (100%) checked choice #1, three (30%) checked choice #2, nine (90%) checked choice #3, five (50%) checked choice #4, seven (70%) checked choice #5, and none checked choices #6

through #9. These results are different from the ones obtained from the visiting teachers. Choices #1, #3, and #4 deal with the dynamics between student and teacher only. The non-visiting teachers seem to give less importance to parental involvement in that relationship. Only 30% checked Choice #2. This is consistent with 50% of the non-visiting teachers feeling that home visits intrude in the parent's life.

For question #3, three teachers (30%) mentioned lack of time as a barrier; three teachers (30%) mentioned lack of safety, four teachers (40%) mentioned a probable poor reception, and one teacher (10%) had no opinion. The responses to this question are consistent with the negative comments made by most teachers during the pretest meeting.

For question #4, four teachers (40%) said they did not know, and seven teachers (70%) expressed the wish for organizational support in terms of extra time, training, partners, and printed materials. These results show that teachers who are not personally motivated to visit their students' homes tend to look for external means of motivation and support.

For question #5, six teachers (60%) said that they did not know, and four teachers (40%) said that the visits

would most likely create a stronger bond of caring and student involvement at school. These responses are indicative of low levels of interest in the home visits program.

For question #6, six teachers (60%) said they did not know, and four teachers (40%) said that visits would probably increase students' motivation to work harder at school. These responses also indicate a low level of interest.

For question #7, three teachers (30%) said that they did not know, and six teachers (60%) said that visits would probably improve students' behavior because they become aware of communication between school and home. If a little more than half the teachers believe in behavioral improvement as a result of their visiting their students' homes and families, why do they not have much enthusiasm to conduct such visits?

Summary of results from teachers who did not do visits. Pride in children was checked by 100% of teachers. Thirty percent felt that parents would feel welcome, and 90% said that visits would help them understand their students' behavior better. Discovering the students' interests and abilities was checked by 50% of the teachers,

and 70% thought that visits are an intrusion in the home life. Time and safety were estimated to be barriers for 30% of teachers respectively, and a poor reception was named by 40%. As for support, 40% did not know, but 70% named specific organizational type support like training and materials. Forty percent did not know how visits might change their relationship with their students, and another 40% though they might create a more positive bond. As for better scores, 60% said they did not know, and 40% said they predicted higher motivation in academic tasks. Finally, 30% did not know about better behavior, but 60% were sure that visits would have a positive on behavior. Overall, the non-visiting teachers were understandably uncertain about several issues. They were more concerned about intrusion and poor reception in homes than the visiting teachers. This seems to indicate that an erroneous perception exists in that area since the teachers who did visits were well received. Many teachers estimated that home visits might improve behavior and relationships between student and teacher. However, these results might have been influenced by the teachers' knowledge that those variables represent one of two main purposes of the program. Their responses might have reflected the Hawthorne effect discussed in Chapter III. Overall, the non-visiting

teachers do not highly value parental involvement in their children's school life and have little or no intrinsic motivation towards conducting home visits.

Preliminary SAT-9S District Results

These results were issued by the School District for this elementary school for 2000-2001 (Appendix D). These data show a consistent increase in all score categories from 1998 to 2001. This trend represents an effort to bring the school out of the underachieving schools list within the State of California. This effort was obviously successful with or without home visits. No detailed analysis will be made of this table because it is not directly relevant to the topic of this evaluation. However, the dramatic increase in scores before the Nell Soto Grant for home visits may partly explain the low level of enthusiasm for visits at the school. It is possible that the staff in general feel good enough about the efforts made, other than home visits. Only a few individual teachers personally favor home visits and they will do them outside of any organized or mandated program to promote them. Yet, the Academic Performance Index (API) issued in January of 2001 shows that this elementary school still ranks low among the other 13 elementary schools in the

District. In fact, it ranks the third lowest. One can infer that home visits need not be dismissed as a valuable avenue of score improvement, but successful means to convince teachers of their value are yet to be discovered.

Individual Students Scores and Behavior Records

Data for five 5th-grade students and one 3rd-grade student were given to me for analysis. These students are numbered from one to six starting with the 3rd-grade student as Student #1. When applicable, raw scores are compared before and after a home visit in the various categories of the SAT-9T Tests, and behavior records are discussed.

Student #1. The scores for 3rd-grade student #1, after a home visit, show *increases* of 15 points in Total Reading, 9 points in Word Study Skills, 9 points in Total Mathematics, 5 points in Problem Solving, and 4 points in Procedures. The scores show a *decrease* of 1 point in Reading Comprehension. It is possible that this student made an effort to complete more tasks, but was not able to increase the critical thinking skills needed in reading comprehension. The behavior records for student #1 corroborate this hypothesis. They indicate intense, frequent, and lasting misbehavior. This student is violent

towards others and himself, he is very disruptive, and he often exhibits mood swings. The mother is frequently called, and she blames the school for not helping her son. A home visit was made. During the visit, the teacher presented several options to the mother who started communicating positively with the school. She chose to have an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) meeting and she planned to attend. The teacher has scheduled another home visit before the IEP to maintain open communication. Student #1 requires a lot of help outside of the typical classroom. It appears that home visits to the mother in this case are vital to create the cooperative environment that will help the student emotionally.

Student #2. This 5th-grade student's scores show a *decrease* of 7 points in Total Reading, 3 points in Reading Vocabulary, 4 points in Reading Comprehension, and 4 points in Language. There is an *increase* of 1 point in Procedures, 3 points in Problem Solving, and 4 points in Total Mathematics. There is no record of misconduct for this student. Apparently, a home visit made no positive impact on this student's academic achievement.

Student #3. This 5th-grade student's scores show an *increase* of 4 points in Total Reading, 4 points in Reading

Vocabulary, 5 points in Total Mathematics, 1 point in Problem Solving, and 4 points in Procedures. There is a *decrease* of 11 points in Language, and no difference in Reading Comprehension. There is no record of misconduct for this student. These scores increases might indicate a slight general improvement after the home visit, yet one would expect Language and Reading Comprehension to also be affected positively.

Student #4. This 5th-grade student is new to the school therefore no comparison with previous scores is possible. The student has a record of misconduct incidents that involve pushing and hitting others. The effect of the home visit cannot be evaluated.

Student #5. This 5th-grade student is new to the school therefore no comparison with previous scores is possible. His misconduct record is lengthy and consists of poor attitude, pushing and hitting others, fights, and other general disrespectful behavior. The parents communicate erratically with the school. The effect of the home visit cannot be evaluated.

Student #6. After the home visit, this 5th-grade student shows an *increase* of 10 points in Total Reading, 17 points in Reading Vocabulary, 3 points in Reading

Comprehension, 2 points in Problem Solving, and 11 points in Language. There is *no change* in Total Mathematics and a *decrease* of 2 points in Procedures. It is inconclusive as to whether the home visit had any impact on these score increases. This student has signed a behavioral contract that will lead to in-house suspension if broken. The home visit was conducted at the parent's request, a rare event. Positive reinforcement techniques were used.

Summary of results for individual scores and misconduct incidents records. The school did not put into place a tracking system for scores and behavior therefore the few documents I receive were sketchy and allow no valid conclusions whatsoever regarding the impact of home visits on students in these two areas. This is surprising and unfortunate since these two areas are the most important ones in a student's life, and they represent the very targets for improvement after home visits.

Anecdotal Data from Formal and Informal Interviews

When I first approached the Principal and School Counselor and expressed my desire to evaluate their home visits program under the Nell Soto Grant they had just received, I perceived mild apprehension. When my intention was communicated to the teachers, I perceived stronger

apprehension that they would be personally judged. I reiterated to all school staff that I had no personal stake in this evaluation, but that I was interested in the idea of home visits without holding any opinion on their value. This situation allowed me to approach the research without preconceived ideas about home visits programs and to make it an exploratory evaluation without putting forth specific hypotheses to be tested statistically.

Formal interviews with the Principal. I had three formal interviews with the Principal in the one-year period since the beginning of my research. In each interview, she was quite willing to let me explore their program and provide me with data. It turned out, however, that the data provided was minimal and poorly collected as described in other results in this chapter. The Principal told me about all the activities other than home visits in which the school involves parents. They consist of social meetings between parents and the Principal on a voluntary basis, a school brochure entitled "Home & School Connection: Working Together for Success," typical parent-teacher conferences, and special parents' nights attended by 60 to 100 parents monthly. According to the Principal, these activities and materials have created goodwill and cooperation between

parents and the school therefore she did not rely strictly on a home visit program to achieve that goal. One major difference, however, is that home visits bring parents and the school together on the parents' ground whereas all the other activities mentioned to me by the Principal take place at the school. Parents have to be willing and find the time to come, and if they do, they are already personally motivated towards connecting with their children's school. The home visits are meant to reach the parents who resist this connection with the school for diverse reasons. The Principal acknowledged the importance of that difference, and she indicated that a few teachers were interested in doing home visits, and she encouraged them.

Anecdotal data from a 5th-grade teacher who conducted home visits. One teacher related a particularly successful experience with one of his students whose home he visited on two occasions. He stated that the visits were friendly and their purpose was to improve the student's behavior as well as regular homework completion. The teacher mentioned an amazing turnaround in the student after he donated a Nintendo Play Station to the family! This information reflects, once more, the individual manner in which

teachers do visits based on their personality, the time, and the personal resources that they wish to use for the visits. It is also debatable that material rewards represent an effective, or even ethical, method of improving relationships with students and their parents. This does not fit in with home visits programs that can be standardized across schools. It does, however, fit in with the examples of home visits found in the literature.

Anecdotal data from a Kindergarten teacher. This informal conversation took place with the Kindergarten teacher who makes frequent home visits for her readiness for Kindergarten program. This teacher has organized her own program and is very happy to be left to her own initiatives. She does not have a system to formally track the visits and their effects. She knows all her students well, and she keeps the information about the impact of the visits in her head. I learned from the Principal that this teacher's work and her program are greatly appreciated.

Summary

The results of this summative evaluation are disappointing if one expected the school staff to put into place strict data collection procedures for monitoring its own use of the Nell Soto Grant funds. Part of my approach

to this evaluation was to allow the school staff to implement the home visits as they saw fit since I wanted to include in the evaluation an assessment of the school's enthusiasm for the program.

In that light, the main results indicate that a home visits program did not generate enthusiasm. The general belief is that the school already provides sufficient activities to link home and school. Only a few teachers have an interest in home visits, so they conduct visits individually, according to their personal style. In general, parents have a positive opinion of the school in every respect, but of course, a few parents and students have had a negative experience with a teacher or another aspect of school life, and this is probably reflected in the results. The data furnished on possible benefits from home visits on students' scores and misconduct are not useful.

Chapter V

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions. At an elementary school in California, administrators and staff have created a culture that favors encouraging parents to come to the school instead of asking teachers to go to the students' homes. Within that culture, only a few teachers value home visits, like doing them, and are free to do so. However, their enthusiasm has not been communicated to the rest of the teaching staff. The visiting teachers conduct the visits in a way that suits their personality and needs. They already have an excellent reputation as teachers. Under these conditions, the Nell Soto Grant provided funds used primarily in activities that foster parental involvement at school. This approach denies value to reaching out to parents on their own ground. At this school, home visits have remained isolated activities by a few teachers. Their success cannot be evaluated with valid, reliable research. Global anecdotal qualitative data indicate positive patterns in parents and teachers' responses, but no statistically tested quantitative data are produced for decision-making regarding home visits programs and justify their funding.

This evaluation was meant to provide the school with solid data regarding its value for the school's population. Since no organized home visits program was implemented, no conclusion can be drawn about the visits within a structured program. In addition, the research questions outlined in Chapter I of this study can only partially be answered with the data from individual visits. The most important research questions about academic and behavioral improvements cannot be answered. Whether home visits improve parental involvement with the school can only be determined by the teachers and parents' general perceptions. A positive trend has been shown in that area with a few exceptions. Whether visits to parents in their home as opposed to interactions on campus decrease their resistance to a relationship with the school cannot be determined. It is also difficult to say whether teachers would enjoy doing visits once they are mandated to do so and experience positive interactions. Overall, the evaluation of home visits at this school confirmed the conclusions from the literature that there are as many home visits programs as there are teachers conducting them. This is not to say that these visits have no value. Value has been determined for individual visits. It does not allow, however, for justification of large funding for home visits

programs specifically because they have not been structured and standardized based on the best reliable research available.

Recommendations. It is evident that home visits programs have not been adopted across the nation as policy to implement Standard 7 from the California Commission of Teacher Credentialing. The literature provides abundant research on theories and constructs that warrant implementing such programs in all schools. The study at an elementary school brings out a difference in understanding of the home-school collaboration for students' benefits that affects the locus of implementation. Are there factors that make relationships with parents and students on their own ground significantly more beneficial than relationships on the school ground? This is an important area to research because it directly impacts the use of funds for the promotion of home-school collaboration. The second important question is whether a few home visits made by teachers who enjoy making them is sufficient to promote effective home-school collaboration when they are combine with other diverse activities. If so, the current situation regarding home visits in schools across the nation is good. Since the media coverage of the existing isolated home

visits programs has tended to present them as magic answers to students' problems in schools, then a new focus must be given to the visits. Systems thinking theory applied to families and reviewed in Chapter II of this report indicates that one small event acts on a system and can have long term, far-reaching ramifications. In light of these comments, my recommendations are as follows:

- Study teachers and staff's perceptions about home visits program in more schools in California and across the nation

- Revisit the theoretical constructs about causal relationships between students' performance, both academic and behavioral, and the interactions between their home and school systems

- Consider whether teachers are the best personnel to conduct the visits since they often resent the time involvement

- Research the benefits of having counselors, social workers, or other professionals conduct regular home visits on a non-targeted basis and provide teachers with results from the visits

that the teachers can use in helping their students in the classroom

- Perform comparative analyses of home-school collaboration on school campuses and in the parents' home for their impact on students' performance and behavior at school and in the home

This study has shown that home visits have value. They generally create goodwill in the parent, the teacher, and the student. The study has also shown that home visits by teachers are conducted as a choice that suits teachers' personal styles therefore it is difficult to implement them as mandatory programs. This may not be a problem if further research confirms that home visits can be one out of many activities that bridge the gap between home and school, and if further research also determines that positive relationships with parents can be created and maintained just as successfully with activities at school as with home visits.

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